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### Ohio State Engineer

**Title:** The Engineers' Bookshelf

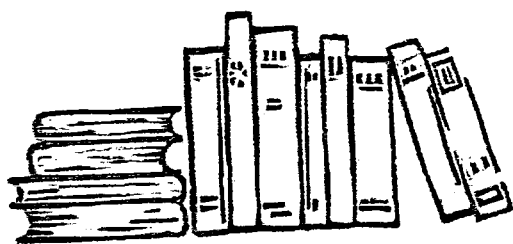
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# The Engineers' Bookshelf

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Before I read John Steinbeck's most recent book, "The Moon Is Down", I was told by no less a critic of the novel than Mrs. Dorothy Canfield Fisher, that the new publication by the author of "The Grapes of Wrath" was not first-rate literature, and that it "probably will not go down in literary history as one of the masterpieces of the art". Now, who am I to disagree with Mrs. Fisher; but disagree I do. "The Moon Is Down" is the very finest piece of writing to come out of the War; and unless I miss my guess, when the hour of Armistice strikes—God hasten the day!—it will stand at the top of a long list of writings that has been showered upon us since the two years before September 1939. With a style of quietness that at times is almost Homeric, Mr. Steinbeck moves his characters across the scene of conflict with such fineness and distinction that the reader hardly knows what is happening.

The locale of "The Moon Is Down" is unnamed, but undoubtedly it is Norway. In a little coastal town of that country on a quiet Sunday morning in September, the citizens are shocked into numbness with the arrival of a transport of soldiers from a conquering country. Quietly they land and quietly they take over the reigns of government. Quietly the invader's band gives a concert in the town square while the citizenry, wide-eyed and open-mouthed, watch the procedure. There is little bloodshed; true, the handful of soldiers defending the town on that fatal morning was in the neighboring hills attending a shooting match arranged for by the local Quisling; when they were met on the road by the enemy, a few shots were fired and two or three men dropped in the dust. But they soon had been buried by the invaders, and matters of state were rounding themselves out nicely for the occupation. It was indeed a coup, a coup that they could have been proud of. With accurate timing the invader had settled with the least possible disturbance. Even Mayor Orden and Dr. Winter, the town's two leading dignitaries, were indeed preparing themselves in their Sunday suits to receive the Colonel.

The story that follows on that quiet Sunday morning in the peaceful Norwegian town is also the story of the fall of Nazism in Germany itself. Colonel Lanser and his staff are unable during the cold bleak

winter months to find ways and means of handling the citizenry. Young men of the town escape to England; girls kill soldiers in their darkened homes with the points of scissors; railroad tracks are blown to bits and the power-house dynamo breaks down; rocks fall from high places on the heads of the soldiers and restaurants serve over-seasoned dishes to the army staff when they come to their meals. Yes, "the flies conquer the fly-paper", for the occupying army is gradually going mad. They are meeting circumstances that were not accounted for in the official manual published by their Leader. They are meeting in their "conquered Norwegians" the stout resistance that some day must arise to help defeat the mailed fist of Germany. They are meeting an item of civilization called decency, an item that years ago was stricken from the German vocabulary, only to be pushed down the gutters of Munich and burned in the bonfires on the campus at Heidelberg.

As I am writing these lines, the news from the various fronts all the way from Java to Germany is not good for the cause of the United Nations. But somehow, this little volume by Mr. Steinbeck lends encouragement to a blackened scene. The day surely must come when the peoples of the vanquished nations of Europe and on the conquered isles of the Pacific will rise to drive out the invaders; will rise quietly, even sullenly, as did the natives in the little coastal Norwegian town of "The Moon Is Down". Today Mr. Steinbeck's new novel is the best literature to come out of the War; tomorrow, I predict, it will be a classic.

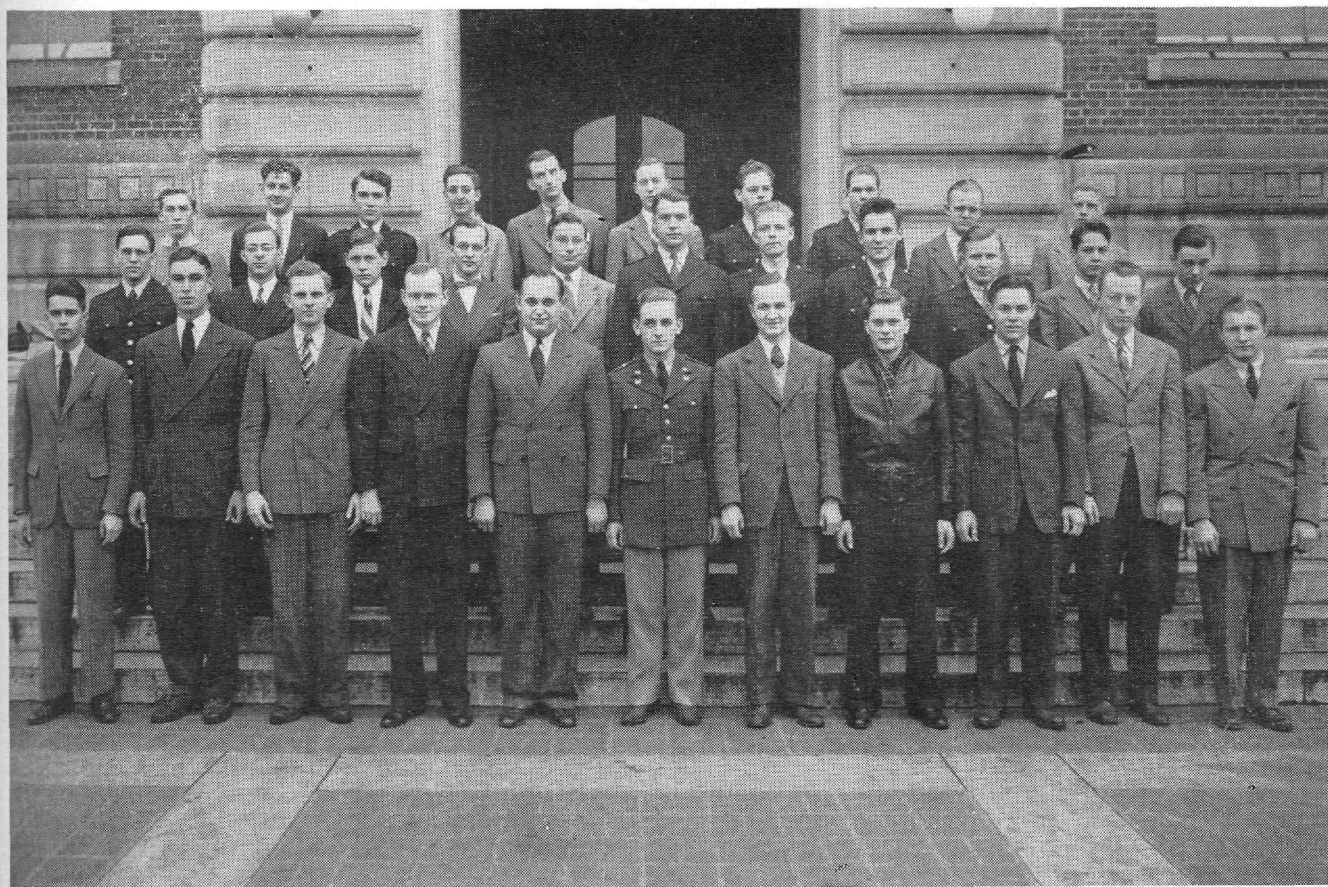
## St. John

For the melodramatic, even for the hysterical, Robert St. John reaches the apex of his career in "From the Land of Silent People". This is an account of his personal adventures in Greece and Crete and Yugoslavia. Mr. St. John is a newspaper correspondent and certainly he should know how to write English better than he does. The word "like" used as a conjunction sticks out like a sore thumb on every page. "Hells" and "damns" and other superfluous vulgarities adorn every paragraph. He shrieks at the top of his voice until in his fury he wears himself out—and also the reader. He piles horror on horror until one feels that he has nothing else to tell, not

another shot in his locker. I suppose that this is journalism, not literature; but in my opinion it is not even good journalism, because it leaves nothing to the imagination. Surely it is far less effective than the self-possessed understatement in Mr. Shirer's "Berlin Diary", a book that makes the reader feel that the author could have said much more than he did.

Furthermore, when Mr. St. John occasionally indulged in philosophy, it is of the shallowest variety. He argues, for example, that no god could approve such bestiality as that inflicted by the Germans on

the conquered countries. Consequently, he says, there is no God. He completely fails to realize that such dreadful events are the final test of faith. Certainly, when early Christian martyrs met the lions in the Roman arena, it never occurred to them to mistrust their Creator. But Mr. St. John is no early Christian martyr; he is a modern American journalist, who apparently assumes that although man is endowed with freedom of will, one can justly hold God responsible for the stupidity and brutality with which mankind exercises that freedom. So much for Mr. St. John and his "Land of Silent People".



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